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Chief Dale Bosworth  
United States Forest Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, DC 20250

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3405  
August 9, 2005

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Dear Chief Bosworth:

I am deeply concerned with recent changes made to the U.S. Forest Service Handbook with respect to grazing permit administration. As you know, grazing on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands is critically important to the state's livestock industry. Any changes to Forest Service grazing rules must be undertaken only after careful study and public consultation.

I have doubts that the impacts of your recently revised Forest Service Handbook, which was published on July 19, 2005, have been fully considered. Specifically, the policy changes regarding base property requirements and share-animal policies would have a devastating effect on the grasslands in North Dakota. In some areas of my state, up to 70 percent of ranchers rely on leased property to run their operations. Many new ranchers use share-animal provisions to build up their own herds. And yet, the Forest Service has proposed significant changes to their policies that will dramatically impact ranchers' normal operating practices -- so far, without giving them adequate opportunity to comment on the impact of those changes.

I understand that the Forest Service has put the grazing policy changes in place but considers them "interim directives" subject to public comment. There appears to be confusion about how and when the new policies will be implemented in addition to concerns about whether the policies themselves are appropriate. I am worried that ranchers seeking to renew or obtain new permits could be immediately affected.

Because of these concerns, I request that you immediately suspend implementation of the policies in the new Grazing Handbook on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands during the interim period. I also request that you provide me written clarification on how the Forest Service plans to implement these policies with respect to new and existing permittees. This should include a description of how the Forest Service will use the interim period to solicit public comment, and what type of communication that agency will have with ranchers, grazing associations, local officials and other stakeholders.

In addition, I intend to convene a field hearing on this issue on August 30, 2005, in Bismarck, North Dakota, and I would sincerely appreciate the participation of you and your key staff. I look forward to using this interim period as an opportunity to ensure that the final grazing policies are fair and balanced. Thank you for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,



Byron L. Dorgan  
United States Senator